HAPPY MOHAMMEDAN

No Scandal, No Divorce Court, No Domestic Misery.

HOW THEIR WOMEN ARE TREATED.

Mr. Alexander Russell Webb Talks About Women and Tells How We May Be Happy.

[New York Recorder.]

"Polygamy! Yes, I know that is the first thing said when I speak of Islamism," said Mr. Alexander Russell Webb, who has come to this country to make us all good Mohammedans.

"But a plurality of wives is by no means a necessary part of the teachings of the prophet. Indeed, out of the 1000 Mohammedans of whom I asked the question: 'How many wives have you?' the answer was invariably, 'Why, only one. I could not love more than one woman. Besides, I am afraid they would quarrel.'

"I think I met at least 5000 Mohammedans in India who had only one wife. A passage in the Koran says: 'If you can love equally more than one wife, and treat each one with equal justice, then you may have more than one. If you have any doubts as to whether you can love them equally, then marry but one.'

"The strictly conscientious follower of the prophet finds this passage considerable of a stumbling-block, since very few men can love equally two women. The Koran limits the number of wives to four, and more than that is directly against the teachings of Mohammed. A harlem is in reality forbidden.

"'A woman has no soul,' has been said of Mohammedan teaching. This is entirely false. On the contrary, Mohammed considered a woman man's superior, spiritually. She must never be forced to be a bread-winner. Man must toil to care for her. She is meant to be his champion, to make his home comfortable, to be the mother of his children, and to perform those duties for which she is physically fitted.

"A homeless Mohammedan woman is an impossibility. I never saw a woman begging in the street during all my residence among them, nor did I see one earning her own living in a public way."

"How, then, do they manage?"

"They are all married."

"But the left-overs, such as the ugly, ill-formed or crippled?"

"Oh, if they are very undesirable, indeed, they are taken into some home to help with the household duties—that is, if they have no male relative to care for them. Family ties and obligations are very strong. It would be a deep disgrace for a man to allow his brother's wife or daughter to be without a home. He must care for them always, unless some one else offers to share the burden with him.

"Suppose I had my deceased brother's family on my hands, very likely some wealthy Mohammedan would come to me and say, 'I wish to help you. Let your brother's wife or daughter'—or perhaps both—'come to me as wives.'

"These women would have in the eyes of the law all the financial advantages of his wives, while in other ways they might simply be wives in name, as he might prefer to remain faithful to the one wife whom he loved. Such cases are of frequent occurrence. These women would be inmates of his home, with rights of dower, and would be always well cared for. But an American could not do that without scandal."

"What do you mean by 'rights of dower?'"

"Before the Mohammedan woman is married her prospective husband must settle upon her a dowry, which is hers unconditionally. If he cannot give a dowry to his wife, then he cannot be married. He must show that he is able to support a wife. She owns her property in her own right and it can never be touched for her husband's debts.

"I tell you a Mohammedan woman is much better protected in money matters than an American woman. She does not have to submit to the brutal state of affairs which obtains in so many families, where a wife never has one penny she can call her own.

"The marriage is never a religious ceremony, but is simply a civil contract, and can be set aside like any other civil contract. Such a thing as a divorce suit, with its attendant scandal, is never known there.

"If a wife is a scold or a tyrant, or otherwise undesirable, she is promptly returned to her parents or male relative. This is apt to make a woman behave herself, and not attempt the lengths to which she sometimes goes in this country, where she thinks, 'Well, now, I've got him, and I can do as I please; he will not want to submit to the scandal of a divorce.'

"I know plenty of men who would give their heads to be rid of their wives, who know that they are flagrantly unfaithful to them, and who yet suffer in silence rather than incur the newspaper gossip and scandal which would be sure to come with a divorce. Then, too, why should people live cat and dog lives, when separation means peace? I much prefer the Moslem way of settling these things."

"But how about the women. Can they get rid of an undesirable husband as easily?"

"Certainly. They have only to go to their nearest male relative and lay the case before him. He goes to the husband and says, 'My niece is unhappy in your house, and does not wish to stay.' 'Very well,' says the husband, 'I do not wish to keep her, then. Take her home whenever you please.' And so the affair is ended quietly and decently. The woman, however, keeps the dowry which has been given her, and will probably be more fortunate in her next married experience.

"This does not occur very often, because such women are not so sentimental, and have not such exaggerated ideas of love as they have here. They find occupation for their minds in reading, music, embroidery, the care of their children and homes.

"A Mohammedan was never known to strike his wife. His conduct toward her is generally respectful, kind and considerate, and he never comes home drunk. A Mohammedan knows not the taste of whisky, wine or beer, except where he has been converted by a Christian missionary and become contaminated by his association with the English.

HE NEVER TELLS SHADY STORIES.

"The marriage relation is to him something sacred, and his wife's name must never be mentioned among other men. He can never regard a man's amours as in any case a subject for laughter, and such a thing as a 'shady' story told among men is unknown.

"When he wishes to marry, his friends go to the friends of the woman and arrange all the preliminaries. He is then permitted to see his intended bride once before the ceremony. If the meeting is not mutually satisfactory, either the man or the woman may withdraw from the contract."

"Do you believe it possible for progressive, modern, American women to become good Mohammedans?"

"Certainly. You must remember that the idea of isolation in harems does not really belong to the teachings of the Koran. It is a part of the Parsee system and is an Indian custom.

"Mohammed enjoined upon women the necessity of modesty in dress. A woman must refrain from leading men into temptation.

"When she appears before them she is not to attract their attention by gorgeous raiment or the display of her charms. The prophet came in a time of great licentiousness among men, and these admonitions were necessary in his efforts to abate the evil. During his life the Arab women enjoyed freedom and much respect.

"I believe an American woman could be a consistent Mohammedan in this way. Let her dress when she appears on Broadway be plain and inconspicuous. Let her leave off the nodding plumes and gorgeous colors from her hat, give up balls, receptions and the display of herself in public; read, study, attend to her house and never forget to pray to her God.

"The Mohammedan women are most modestly robed. They wear white almost entirely, either in soft light silk or muslin. The garments fall from the throat to the feet in loose folds that conceal the figure as much as possible. The sleeves are long and full, and are confined with a band at the wrist.

"They wear very few jewels, except in the case of the lower or middle classes, who often pierce the ear around the entire rim and hang rings as thickly as they can. These, too, wear nose rings.

"The children of the wealthy are richly attired in gold embroidered garments, and gayly lined materials. The men, too, often have jewels and embroidery on their headgear, because they have to be seen abroad among men.

"The Mohammedan dress for both men and women, consisting, as it does of long, loose, light garments, is admirably adapted to the warm climate. I sometimes put on the dress, and I know of nothing so delightful and comfortable to wear.

"I shall soon have several translators here to render portions of the Koran and other Mohammedan literature into English, when I hope Americans will judge of these truths for themselves.

ALICE E. IVES."

WASHINGTON LETTER.

From our Regular Correspondent.

The new administration, like a new broom, sweeps clean, but the sweeping is only just begun, and there is so much rubbish that needs sweeping into the refuse pile that it would be risky to predict the final outcome of the sweeping. However, that should not prevent credit being given for what has been done; the promises of what will be done can wait. Few, if any, practical men of affairs ever transacted any business of magnitude with the government without becoming convinced that there was need of reform both in the method and manner of doing business in the departments; that there was too much red tape and too many employes. It was this sentiment that caused the adoption of an amendment to an appropriation bill at the last session of Congress, appointing a joint congressional committee to investigate the departments and report as to how the methods may be improved and the number of employes reduced without detriment to the public service. This sentiment has also been adopted by the administration, and a number of useless employes have already been dismissed from the treasury and agricultural departments, and the promise made that the sinecures and barnacles are to be weeded out in all the rest of them as fast as the heads of departments can locate them. What has been done is a step in the right direction and if the administration will only keep its promise to put the departments on a purely business basis it will deserve the thanks of every taxpayer in the land. But it is no easy task, as those familiar with the situation know, for the sinecures and the barnacles are the very ones who have the strongest "pull," both political and social, and more than one administration has failed in sincere attempts to oust them.

The daily scenes at the White House are very amusing to the few who have nothing at stake and who don't care a brass button who gets the plums; the fun isn't so apparent to the waiters and hopers. To fully enjoy the thing one must have been here from the beginning of the administration, when senators and representatives stalked into the White House with a sort of I've-got-to-have-'em air, while their admiring constituents followed with an O-I-am-all-right smile. Several attempts have been made to have state delegations act in concert in recommending men for appointment, but all of them have been abandoned and it is now a question of every senator and member getting whatever he can whether the other fellow gets anything or not. The applicants and their congressional backers have all dropped their over-confident air and they now approach President Cleveland in a please-may-I-have-it style. The last three weeks in Washington ought to have convinced any outsider who has been here of the folly of becoming an office seeker, but cannot compel me to say that they haven't, and that some who were at first merely onlookers have allowed themselves to become office seekers.

The new order closing the offices of the members of the cabinet to the public on Tuesdays and Fridays, the days on which the cabinet meets, is not popular, either with congressmen, office seekers or business men who wish to see these gentlemen. On Mondays President Cleveland sees no one, unless by special appointment.

Senator Martin, of Kansas, says that he has assurances that the Populists of his state will be recognized in the distribution of federal patronage, notwithstanding the popular impression to the contrary.

The threat of the Republican senators to resort to filibustering if the Democrats attempted to elect the officers nominated by their caucus will, it is believed, result in postponing the election of the officers until the regular session. A number of senators are not disposed to take part in any controversy as they have made arrangements to leave town as the vote is taken upon the question of seating the appointed senators, regardless of whether the Senate shall adjourn or remain in session.

The old superstition about its being "bad luck" for a United States senator to build a house in Washington is recalled by the announcement that the elegant residence erected by Senator Sawyer, of Wisconsin, not three years ago, has been leased for a period of six years, beginning the first of next June, to Senator Stockbridge, of Michigan, who is to keep up the repairs, pay the taxes, and pay an annual rental of $5000 for it. The rent is considered cheap as the house is valued at $115,000.

Those people who believe that the title "ambassador" will add dignity and influence to American ministers abroad ought to be happy, as, under a law of the last Congress, the President is authorized to send ambassadors to such European countries as send ambassadors to us, and England and France have already promoted their American ministers to ambassadors. Wonder what old Ben Franklin and other sturdy American ministers abroad in the early days of the republic would think of this wrinkle?

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Salt Lake City, March ..., 1893.

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